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Proteomic analyses of nipple fluid for early detection of breast cancer

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14. ABSTRACT Our purpose is to combine the well-established method of breast nipple fluid collection with new proteomics methodology for analyses of complex protein mixtures, in order to seek a better test for early breast cancer. The scope of our work is far-reaching, as our results could have a significant impact on the ability to detect occult breast cancers at earlier stages than is possible with current cancer detection methods. To date, we have completed a pilot test of 12 patients to optimize collection and lab storage and analysis conditions. Throughout the last year, we have completed sample collection: we have collected a total of 255 nipple aspirate fluid (NAF) samples (58 case samples and 197 control samples). Our modification of the collection protocol to collect NAF directly with capillary has been successful. This collection procedure is more efficient providing more useable samples for lab analysis. We have run test samples using SELDI-TOF methodology that showed significant numbers of peaks on IMAC40 chips thereby validating both the collection and analysis protocols. In summary, we have developed a workable protocol for nipple fluid collection that produces consistent quantitative protein analysis. We have completed sample collection and will turn our attention to sample analysis in the coming year.					
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## Table of Contents

Cover.....	1
SF 298.....	2
Introduction.....	4
Body.....	4
Key Research Accomplishments.....	5
Reportable Outcomes.....	5
Conclusion.....	5
References.....	6
Appendices.....	6

## **INTRODUCTION:**

When breast cancers are diagnosed by self-examination, clinical examination and/or mammography, the tumor is usually comprised of millions of genetically unstable cancer cells, including subclones differing in responses to therapy. The goal of our project is to find a new method to detect occult breast cancers at earlier stages than is possible with current cancer detection methods. To achieve our goals, we have combined the well-established method of breast nipple fluid collection with the new proteomics methodology for analyses of complex protein mixtures, in order to seek a better test for early breast cancer. We aim to collect breast nipple fluids from 200 women with yet-untreated breast cancer (cases), and 200 cancer-free controls and perform proteomic analyses in 100 cases and 100 controls to identify nipple fluid protein patterns associated with the presence of breast cancer. Specific proteins and patterns will be validated by repeating the proteomic studies on a second blinded series of fluids from another series of 100 cases and 100 controls, link laboratory results with clinical and diagnostic data, and score the sensitivity and specificity of the assay. If successful, the proteomics assay might permit earlier breast cancer diagnosis, and thereby reduce disease morbidity and mortality.

## **BODY:**

### Task 1. Subject recruitment and consent (years 1 and 2)

(This work has been completed)

- a. We modified our existing IRB-approved protocol (93-020: Collection and Laboratory Study of Breast Nipple Fluid Using a Nipple Suction Cup) to include proteomic analyses among the laboratory assays, renaming it 03-249. After receiving full IRB and DOD approval of 03-249, we closed 93-020 for recruitment, leaving it open only for data analysis.
- b. We consented eligible subjects and their physicians to collect breast nipple fluid samples and demographic and clinical data from 58 women with newly diagnosed breast cancer. The limiting factor to enrollment of cases was the availability of eligible patients. In an effort to increase enrollment of cases, we increased our efforts on the expansion of opportunities for case recruitment within the DOD-approved sites. We screened the patients of six surgeons and approached eligible cases on the day of their breast surgery. This recruitment strategy resulted in an increase in case accrual, and an 80 percent consent rate of the women approached for the study. We have completed case enrollment.
- c. Additionally, we ceased enrollment of 197 cancer-free control subjects examined at the mammography centers and breast clinics within Dana-Farber/Harvard Cancer Center.

### Task 2. Nipple fluid collection (years 1 and 2)

(This work has been completed)

- a. We continued to use our previously developed methods to collect nipple fluids into capillary tubes from subjects. We have collected 255 NAF samples to date. Of these, 197 are non-cancerous controls, and 58 are from cancerous samples..
- b. Nipple aspirate fluid samples were extracted by surgeons in the operating room prior to surgery. This new method of collection yielded us an average rate of two cases collected per week.
- c. Samples were delivered to Dr Miron's laboratory where they are stored at -140 degrees C after recording the volume.

### Task 3. Biomarker discovery in nipple fluid (years 1 and 2)

- a. We have optimized lab conditions to analyze NAF after collection. Optimization includes: (1) having established a NAF recovery protocol from the capillary tubes using a denaturing buffer and centrifugation, which is well suited for high-throughput studies; and (2) running test

samples with the SELDI-TOF methodology. Significant numbers of peaks were detected in those samples on IMAC40 chips thereby validating both the collection and analysis protocols.

- b. Further analysis will be performed on a complete set of aspirates at the end of the collection phase of the study. We aim to perform proteomic analyses on 58 aliquots of nipple fluids from breast cancer cases and 197 cancer-free cases, using SELDI-TOF methodology using each of the chip surfaces in duplicate. *(As we have recently completed collection, this work is just commencing;; such work can only be done in batches to minimize other sources of variation)*

#### Task 4. Identification and validation of nipple fluid biomarkers for cancer (years 2 and 3)

*(This work is commencing)*

- a. Identify protein patterns in the arrays that differentiate nipple fluids obtained from cancerous breasts as compared with tumor-free breasts.
- b. Catalogue the protein markers present in nipple fluids from cancerous breasts that are absent from nipple fluids of cancer-free women.
- c. To validate the preliminary findings from the first set of samples, a third party will code the second series of 58 nipple fluid samples from cancerous samples and 197 cancer-free samples.
- d. Repeat the SELDI-TOF analyses in a blinded manner on the 58 case samples and 197 controls.
- e. Analyze data for the 255 blinded samples and score the source of the sample as a cancer-bearing breast, normal breast or indeterminate origin.
- f. Break the sample codes and quantify the sensitivity and specificity of the assay in differentiating breast cancer cases from healthy controls.
- g. Identify causes of false-positive and false-negatives.

#### Task 5. Dissemination of results and, if appropriate, organize multi-center studies (year 3)

*(To date, no work has been done on this task)*

- a. Prepare manuscript(s) for peer-review and publication.
- b. If the proteomic analysis is shown to have high predictive value, develop a multi-center collaborative to re-confirm the results in a larger study.
- c. Seek additional funding to further refine the assay, and submit a Traditional Research Proposal.

#### **KEY RESEARCH ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- We have worked out a collection method that is efficient and obtains a high-yield of nipple aspirate fluid.
- We have determined that resuspending the aspirate in a small amount of PBS allows for full recovery of the sample.
- We have developed systematic protocol for collection that is easily adaptable to other sites.

#### **REPORTABLE OUTCOMES:**

*None to date*

#### **CONCLUSION:**

To date, we have developed a workable protocol for nipple aspirate collection that produces consistent quantitative protein analysis. We have completed a pilot collection phase to optimize collection and analysis methods. We have successfully collected 255 NAF samples. We have developed a successful method of collecting nipple fluid samples and averaged two cases collected per week. We have completed sample collection and are commencing sample analysis. We look forward to completing analysis over the next year.

**REFERENCES:**

None

**APPENDICES:**

None